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Transoceanic Arabic historiography: sharing the past of the sixteenth-century western Indian Ocean[†]

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Abstract

The early modern western Indian Ocean constituted a dynamic space of human interaction. While scholarship has mostly concentrated on trade and commerce, recent studies have shifted the focus to social and cultural mobilities. This article argues for the emergence of a transoceanic Arabic historiography during the sixteenth century, which reflected on the cultural integration of regions from Egypt, the Hijaz, and Yemen in the Red Sea region, to Gujarat, the Deccan, and Malabar in the subcontinent. Historians from the Persian cosmopolis further north observed a strong cultural connection between Arabophone communities of the western Indian Ocean region. Manuscript collections in India show that Arabic historical texts from the Red Sea region had a readership in the subcontinent. Most importantly, mobile scholars began to compose Arabic histories while receiving patronage at the western Indian courts. Scholarly mobilities fostered cultural exchanges, which increasingly built on a shared history, written, read, and circulated in Arabic during the sixteenth century

Keywords: Arabic mobilities; history writing; manuscripts; Persian cosmopolis; transoceanic

Introduction

Oceans divide continents but they also connect their shores. Over the early modern period, maritime trade increasingly integrated the regions of the western Indian Ocean. Spices were traded from Malabar in south India to Yemen on the Arabian peninsula, with the eventual terminus in Cairo further west.¹ Trade went hand in hand with political ambitions, and fostered aspirations to transoceanic empire building and maritime exploration across a sea of exchanges that were otherwise determined by the monsoon.² Slaves from East Africa were shipped across the ocean

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¹Sebastian Prange, ‘Measuring by the bushel: reweighing the Indian Ocean pepper trade’, *Historical Research*, 84, 224, 2011, pp. 212–35.

²Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ‘Iranians abroad: intra-Asian elite migration and early modern state formation’, *Journal of Asian Studies*, 51, 2, 1992, pp. 340–63; Giancarlo Casale, *The Ottoman age of exploration*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 4–8, 23–6; Sebastian Prange, *Monsoon Islam: trade and faith on the medieval Malabar coast*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

to serve in the armies of the subcontinent.³ Pilgrims from around the Indian Ocean basin and beyond congregated in the Hijaz for the annual *hajj*.⁴ Studies of the early modern western Indian Ocean region have highlighted these multi-layered configurations of networks, connections, and exchanges that spanned its waters.⁵ They render the story of the western Indian Ocean prone to partial analysis, since its sheer scope defies an all-encompassing narrative. Instead of an *histoire totale*, a recently formulated ‘new thalassology’ has identified ‘the spread of ideas and cultural practices’ as one among many promising future pathways of research.⁶ In a similar vein, Sujit Sivasundaram has emphasized that knowledge formation and cultural exchange have important transoceanic trajectories, which need to be integrated into the study of the Indian Ocean history.⁷

Maritime connections gave rise to cosmopolitan forms of writing history. This article argues that the sixteenth century saw the emergence of a new kind of transoceanic Arabic historiography. Highly mobile scholars used Arabic to write historical texts in the subcontinent. Their biographical works and chronicles borrowed from both the model of collective biographies, prevalent across the eastern Mediterranean and the Red Sea region, and forms of Persian history writing in the subcontinent and beyond. These historians held affiliations with courts in Gujarat and the Deccan. However, they used Arabic to reflect on the history of events and communities within the western Indian Ocean region and thereby integrated the history of this region into a transoceanic Arabic historiography.

Recently, Engseng Ho provided a crucial starting point for the emergence of a sixteenth-century transoceanic historiography in Arabic. According to him, an ‘Islamic ecumene’ emerged during the fifteenth-century reconfiguration of the Indian Ocean.⁸ Commercial activities intensified and merchants started to realign trading networks along a circuit that centred on the Hijaz and Yemen in the west, and Gujarat, the Konkan, and Malabar in the east. The rise of the Muzaffarid sultanate in Gujarat and the Bahmanī sultanate in the Deccan reinforced a transoceanic pull on mobile communities, who spotted professional opportunities through courtly patronage. Central to his work are the *sayyids* from the Hadramawt in Yemen, in particular the al-‘Aydārūs kinship group, who transformed their sacred lineage that went back to the Prophet Muḥammad into social capital, which served them as crucial currency among the subcontinent’s elites. Ho’s notion of ‘local cosmopolitans’ captures their ability to become rooted in different places, while at the same time forging transient networks that allowed them to remain mobile. Members of the al-‘Aydārūs kinship group served as advisers, scholars, and administrative personnel at royal courts and among learned communities.

From their individual life trajectories, these *sayyids* composed Arabic texts, ‘travelling texts’, which mirrored all the things that mattered for such highly exclusive, mobile communities: the tool of genealogy, which accommodated new family ties; courtly patronage in faraway places; and learned affiliations through scholarly circles.⁹ Ho offers a seminal analysis of one of the Arabic ‘travelling texts’, the *Nūr al-sāfir ‘an akhbār al-qarn al-‘āshir* (*The travelling light regarding the*

³Richard Eaton, ‘Malik Ambar (1548–1626): the rise and fall of military slavery’, in Meena Bhargava, ed., *Exploring medieval India, sixteenth to eighteenth centuries I: politics, economy, religion*, New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2010, pp. 121–47.

⁴Suraiya Faroqhi, *Pilgrims and sultans: the hajj under the Ottomans, 1517–1683*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1994; Michael Pearson, *Pilgrimage to Mecca: the Indian experience, 1500–1800*, Princeton, NJ: Wiener, 1996.

⁵Prange, *Monsoon Islam*; Markus Vink, ‘Indian Ocean studies and the “new thalassology”’, *Journal of Global History*, 2, 2007, pp. 41–62.

⁶Vink, ‘Indian Ocean studies’, p. 61.

⁷Sujit Sivasundaram, ‘The Indian Ocean’, in David Armitage, Alison Bashford, and Sujit Sivasundaram, eds., *Oceanic histories*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 31–61.

⁸Here, and in what follows, see Engseng Ho, *The graves of Tarim: genealogy and mobility across the Indian Ocean*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006, pp. 99–105.

⁹For this paragraph, see *ibid.*, pp. 116–25.

stories of the tenth century, sixteenth century CE). ‘Abd al-Qādir al-‘Aydārūs penned it in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, in the early seventeenth century. In it, he combined the events and the people of the sixteenth century that he deemed worthy of remembrance. His centenary framework of selection had prominent precedents. He had learned this tradition of history writing from the scholarly communities of Syria, Egypt, Iraq, and the Hijaz. They had employed this model to record, remember, and respect members of a transregional learned community. Their authors established their own criteria of selection, and thus the biographical dictionaries that emerged from such a practice are also highly personal stories reflecting their worldviews.¹⁰ Al-‘Aydārūs’ intellectual genealogy can be traced back to two famous historians of the Red Sea region. Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī and his student Muḥammad al-Sakhāwī wrote similar biographical works about the eighth/fourteenth and ninth/fifteenth centuries, respectively, while living in Egypt, Syria, and the Hijaz. Thus, Ho’s observed ‘shift in East–West trade routes, from the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea, [which] brought Hadramawt and Aden into greater contact with Egypt, the Hejaz, and India’, was paralleled by a spread in ideas and cultural practices in Arabic history writing from the Red Sea region to Gujarat.¹¹

The story from the perspective of the al-‘Aydārūs family and their texts is, however, only one partial way to tell it. There is a broader context of these transoceanic learned exchanges. The proliferation of Arabic historical writing followed the earlier spread of learned figures and the creation of scholarly networks. Movements between the subcontinent and the Red Sea region had gained pace during the fifteenth century. A growing community of Indians travelled to the Hijaz to study with prominent teachers, to receive teaching certificates, and to copy books.¹² At the same time, more and more learned figures ventured the other way as well. Lavish courtly patronage at a growing number of courts offered them high rewards.¹³ Several scholars chose al-Hind to pursue an academic career, to compose books, and to teach. For example, the Egyptian scholar Muḥammad al-Damāmīnī (d. 828/1424) made his way from Egypt, via the Hijaz, to Yemen, and then further on to al-Hind in the fifteenth century.¹⁴ He received patronage from several sultans in Gujarat and the Deccan. Moving from court to court, he composed three commentaries on Arabic grammars initially written in the Red Sea region and western Asia. For the fifteenth century, John Meloy has shed light on the growing corpus of ‘local histories’ by members of the Banū Fahd family in Mecca, which documented the increasing interactions between their hometown and South Asia, especially through the movement of people.¹⁵ Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam have recently offered a study of one of these historical texts to understand the connected histories of the Red Sea and Gujarat, and have thereby complicated the picture of Arabic history writing in the Indian Ocean as seen from Mecca. They show that scholarly exchanges continued during the sixteenth century, as is evident from a work written by the Meccan historian Jārullāh b. Fahd. It reports the comings and goings of courtly embassies, precious cargo, and ‘savant-migrants’ between the Hijaz and Gujarat.¹⁶

¹⁰Konrad Hirschler, ‘Studying Mamluk historiography: from source-criticism to the cultural turn’, in Stephan Conermann, ed., *Ubi sumus? Quo vademus? Mamluk studies, state of the art*, Göttingen: V & R Unipress, 2013, pp. 159–86.

¹¹Ho, *Graves of Tarim*, p. 99.

¹²Christopher Bahl, ‘Reading *tarājim* with Bourdieu: prosopographical traces of historical change in the South Asian migration to the late medieval Hijaz’, *Der Islam, Journal of the History and Culture of the Middle East*, 94, 1, 2017, pp. 234–275.

¹³Christopher Bahl, ‘Histories of circulation: sharing Arabic manuscripts across the western Indian Ocean, 1400–1700’, PhD thesis, SOAS, University of London, 2018, pp. 46–53.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 76–153.

¹⁵John Meloy, *Imperial power and maritime trade: Mecca and Cairo in the later Middle Ages*, Chicago, IL: Middle East Documentation Center, 2010.

¹⁶Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ‘A view from Mecca: notes on Gujarat, the Red Sea, and the Ottomans, 1517–39/923–946 AH’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 51, 2, 2017, pp. 286–90. See also Nile Green, *Making space: Sufis and settlers in early modern India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 12.

The sixteenth-century spread of Arabic history writing across the western Indian Ocean has to be studied within a broader geographical and empirical context. In the following, I will discuss the emergence of a transoceanic Arabic historiography from three perspectives. First, I will zoom out and explore the traces of this transoceanic Arabic historiography as seen from the Persianate world, a transregional sphere of cultural influence that stretched from Anatolia via Iran, Central and South Asia, to Southeast Asia. Specific to the current purpose, I will focus on the *Haft iqlīm* (*The seven climes*), a sixteenth-century Persian work by Amin Aḥmad Rāzi, a scholar from Safavid Iran.¹⁷ From his vantage point in the ‘Persian cosmopolis’, a transoceanic entanglement based on Arabic exchanges was observable.¹⁸ At the same time, this text can serve as a starting point to discuss important entanglements between the Arabic and Persian circulations, the flows between them, and the limits of exchange. Transoceanic Arabic history writing emerged alongside a diverse Persian historiography that had taken shape over the medieval period and provided the form and means in history writing at Muslim courts.¹⁹ Persian universal chronicles and histories played a central role from the Mughal north, across the Deccan, and further south to the principalities of south India.²⁰ The elite groups at courts in the subcontinent and the wider Persianate world constituted the main audiences of these works.²¹

Secondly, a transoceanic Arabic historiography did not emerge out of thin air. Contemporary manuscript collections in India hold a diverse corpus of Arabic historical texts from the early modern and modern periods. Significantly, almost all the manuscripts that are held in the most prominent collections in Rampur (Uttar Pradesh), Patna (Bihar), Kolkata (West Bengal), and Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh/Telangana) – to be discussed below – are concerned with the history of the Red Sea region, especially Egypt, the Hijaz, and Yemen. Ownership statements, reading notes, and other traces of perusal and transmission demonstrate the wide circulation of these Arabic historical manuscripts among readers in South Asia. With these manuscripts, it becomes possible to look at the transoceanic cultural references from the reception side of historical texts, and thus the aspect of *reading* in a transoceanic Arabic historiography.

Thirdly, during the sixteenth century, the relative diffusion of Arabic scholarly traditions and literacy provided a conducive environment for the writing of Arabic historical texts. Other historical texts survive, some of them previously studied for their own merit, and others essentially untouched. I argue that the Arabic historical texts from the sixteenth-century subcontinent have to be read together to consider their cumulative significance: a deeper historical consciousness and reflection about the transoceanic connections that linked communities from both sides of the sea. While mobile historians certainly had an eye on the South Asian audience, it is significant that they aimed at a broader transoceanic narrative and readership. Arabic historical texts from Gujarat to the Deccan and Malabar are of importance because they transcend courtly and regional contexts to engage with the pasts of transoceanic communities. I will offer a reading of the transoceanic cultural references of the texts – in terms of both their story of composition and their contents – that reflects on the historical connections of South Asia with the Red Sea region.

¹⁷Ahmed Rāzi, *Tazkere-ye haft iqlīm (Chronicles of the seven climes)*, 3 vols., ed. S. Taheri (Hazrat), Tehran: Soroush Press, 1999.

¹⁸Derived from Pollock’s and Ricci’s works, discussed below, the term ‘Persian cosmopolis’ has proliferated in South Asian scholarship. See, for example, Richard Eaton, ‘The Persian cosmopolis (900–1900) and the Sanskrit cosmopolis (400–1400)’, in Abbas Amanat and Assef Ashraf, eds., *The Persianate world: rethinking a shared sphere*, Leiden: Brill 2018, pp. 63–83.

¹⁹Peter Hardy, *Historians of medieval India: studies in Indo-Muslim historical writing*, London: Luzac, 1960.

²⁰Stephan Conermann, *Historiographie als Sinnstiftung: Indo-persische Geschichtsschreibung während der Mogulzeit (932–1118/1516–1707)*, Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2002; David Shulman, *Vēlcēru Nārāyanarāvu*, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Textures of time: writing history in South India, 1600–1800*, New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001.

²¹Roy Fischel, ‘Origin narratives, legitimacy, and the practice of cosmopolitan language in the early modern Deccan, India’, *Purushartha*, 33, 2015, pp. 71–95.

Thus, with this set of texts, the focus will be on the *writing* of Arabic historical texts and their proliferation among communities of western India during the sixteenth century. The texts are Ḥājī al-Dabir al-Uluḡkhānī's *Zafar al-wālih bi-Muẓaffar wa- ālihi* (*The victory of the fervent concerning Muẓaffar and his family*) and 'Abd al-Qādir al-'Aydārūs' *al-Nūr al-sāfir 'an akhbār al-qarn al-āshir* (*The unveiled light concerning the news about the tenth century*) for Gujarat, Ibn Shadqam al-Madani's *Zahr al-riyād wa-zulal al-ḥiyād* (*The flower of the garden and the pure water of the cisterns*) for the Deccan, and Zayn al-Dīn al-Malibārī's *Tuḥfat al-Mujāhidīn fī ba'd aḥwāl al-burtukāliyyīn* (*The gem of the proponents of Jihād concerning some of the news about the Portuguese*) for Malabar.²²

Compared to a substantial corpus of Persian chronicles, prosopographies, and hagiographical works, the transoceanic Arabic history corpus seems rather small. Yet small does not mean insignificant. Taken together, the texts of this Arabic corpus reflect on particular confluences in the sixteenth-century western Indian Ocean (see figure 1).²³ This article begins the task of exploring and delineating them.

Excavating an Arabic transoceanic connection: Rāzī's Seven climes

In the late sixteenth century, historians in the Persian cosmopolis of Iran and northern India were aware of the Arabic maritime network that spanned the Red Sea region and western India.²⁴ Scholars who inhabited the Persianate worlds imagined these cultural links in the context of geographical descriptions in narrative texts. In 1594, Amīn Aḥmad Rāzī, a scholar from Safavid Iran, finished the composition *Haft iqlīm* (*The seven climes*) after a final editing period of six years.²⁵ In this Persian composition he combined topographical, biographical, and historical aspects of the world known to him.²⁶ He divided this world up into seven geographical zones or climes (*aqālīm*, sing. *iqlīm*).²⁷ The first clime included Yemen, Nubia, and China. The second reached from Mecca to Hormuz, and via Gujarat to the Deccan. The third extended from Iran and Iraq to northern India. The fourth focused on Iran and present-day Afghanistan. The fifth consisted of broader Transoxiana. The sixth stretched across Turkestan and the Russian steppes to Anatolia. The seventh listed the Slavs, and ended with the mythical figures Gog and Magog.

Such a sevenfold conceptual geography had its predecessor in earlier periods. Medieval Arab geographers developed different but often very persistent notions, which structured their worlds.²⁸

²²Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn 'Umar Uluḡkhānī, *An Arabic history of Gujarat: Zafar ul-wālih bi Muẓaffar wa ālih*, 3 vols., edited from the unique and autograph copy in the Library of the Calcutta Madrasah and with a preface by E. Denison Ross, London: John Murray, 1910–28; 'Abd al-Qādir b. Shaykh al-'Aydārūs, in Ahmad Hālū, Mahmūd Arnā'ūt and Akram Būshī, eds., *al-Nūr al-sāfir 'an akhbār al-qarn al-āshir*, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2001. Ibn Shadqam al-Madani, three volumes: vol. 1: National Library, Kolkata, MS 269; vol. 2: Rampur Raza Library, Rampur (henceforth RRL), MS 4428; vol. 3: British Library, London, MS Delhi Arabic 1329. Al-Malibārī: British Library, MS IO Islamic 2807e.

²³For a different approach to writing history across the globe, see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'On world historians in the sixteenth century', *Representations*, 91, 1, 2005, pp. 26–57.

²⁴For a recent summary, see Jos Gommans, 'Continuity and change in the Indian Ocean basin', in Jeremy Bentley, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, eds., *The Cambridge world history, volume 6: the construction of a global world, 1400–1800 CE, part 1: foundations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 182–209.

²⁵Evgenli Berthels, 'Rāzī', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, Brill Online, 2012, http://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_6269 (consulted 28 May 2018).

²⁶Rāzī, *Tazkere-ye haft eqlim*. I thank Francesca Orsini for providing me with her unpublished paper on "Significant geographies": in lieu of "world" literature', Paris, 5 February 2016, and for making me aware of this geographical treatise, which she mentioned in her elaboration of conceptual and imaginative geographies.

²⁷For the following summary, see Berthels, 'Rāzī'.

²⁸Martin Lewis and Kären Wigen, *The myth of continents: a critique of metageography*, Berkeley, CA, and London: University of California Press, 1997.



Figure 1. The early modern western Indian Ocean region. Map based on John Meloy, *Imperial power and maritime trade: Mecca and Cairo in the later Middle Ages*, Chicago, IL: Middle East Documentation Center, 2010. Reproduced with the permission of the Middle East Documentation Center, the University of Chicago. Changes to the map by O. Nelson, chinooktype.com.

In the Abbasid period, for example, geographers and *littérateurs* made sense of increasing interactions with ethnicities and cultures from east to west and north to south; they would establish links between a climate zone and its inhabitants, and thereby also provide justifications for the

enslavement of certain ethnic groups, and the cultural dominance of others.²⁹ According to medieval ethnographic works, it was the climate zone that determined the cultural characteristics of peoples living in it, and consequently structured the populated parts of the world in a hierarchical manner.³⁰ Geographers not only described the world in ways comprehensible to their audiences. They also provided a culturally commensurable version of it by reflecting on what they knew about it.

Naturally, this was also the case with Rāzī's work; however, his mental map differed remarkably in comparison with previous geographical divisions of the world. His underlying conceptions cut across several seemingly naturally perceived areas, at least in comparison to geographical treatises from the medieval period.³¹ Regions such as Iran and al-Hind were broken up to create new cultural zones that made more sense to him.³² Each of his climes contained a succession of entries on the cities, regions, and personalities which made up the social fabric of that geographical zone. The fourth zone traditionally represented the central one of the seven climes,³³ usually the place of origin of the person who had penned the treatise and therefore the most elevated and prestigious of the seven zones.³⁴ As in earlier treatises, the location of the fourth zone, its climate, and its significance as the earliest habitation of humankind distinguished this area from the other climes.³⁵ Temperament, nature, knowledge, and virtue rendered its inhabitants superior to their neighbours. At the same time, this clime seemed to describe a central part of the early modern Persianate world, which Rāzī and his family of literary fame inhabited.³⁶ Judging from the enumeration of regions and cities, the fourth clime consisted of the core cultural centres in Persian history, such as Khurasan and Tabriz, as well as places that became prominent because of their famous learned men, such as Astarabad and Gilan. By grouping certain places and their people within one clime, Rāzī ordered the world in terms commensurable to him. Each zone represented an internal cultural affinity as its *raison d'être*.

Rāzī's second clime imagined an Arabic connection between the Red Sea region and western India as a discernible cultural zone. This clime consisted of the Hijaz with Mecca and Medina on the Arabian peninsula and the port city of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf.³⁷ It then moved across the *baḥr al-hind* (Indian Ocean) to link these places with the historic region of the Deccan, subdivided further into Ahmadnagar, Dawlatabad, and Telangana, and adding Ahmadabad in Gujarat.³⁸ In the introduction to this section, Rāzī provided the defining outer limits of this space: it stretched from China across India, and from Iran into Africa.³⁹ It was made up of seventy-seven cities, many of them located in the Arab lands. Owing to the religious importance of Mecca, the seat of the Hijaz (*čün kursī-yi Hijāz Makka ast*), this city provided the starting point in the western part, and connected ultimately with the towns, forts, and people of the Deccan plateau. Therefore, I suggest a reading of his compilation of these places and people in the second geographical zone as an expression of underlying close cultural and social ties. While the reason for this geographical arrangement is not elaborated further, this second clime can still be treated as an analogous case to Rāzī's own fourth zone, albeit on a lower rank in his hierarchical conception.

²⁹Susanne Enderwitz, *Gesellschaftlicher Rang und ethnische Legitimation: arabische Schriftsteller Abū 'Utmān al-Ġāhiz (gest. 868) über die Afrikaner, Perser und Araber in der islamischen Gesellschaft*, Freiburg: Schwarz, 1979; Andre Miquel, 'Iklim', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, http://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_3519 (consulted 18 May 2017).

³⁰Bernard Lewis, *Race and slavery in the Middle East*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

³¹Miquel, 'Iklim'.

³²Rāzī, *Tazkere-ye haft eqlim*, vol. 1, pp. 29–82, 83–515.

³³Miquel 'Iklim'.

³⁴Rāzī, *Tazkere-ye haft eqlim*, vol. 2, pp. 518–1441.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 517.

³⁶Berthels, 'Rāzī'; Rāzī, *Tazkere-ye haft eqlim*, vol. 2, pp. 518–1441.

³⁷*Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 29–82.

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 29.

Rāzī's observation makes it possible to excavate and set into context an Arabic transoceanic connection. This maritime Arabic connection at times rivalled, complemented, or simply paralleled the Persian cosmopolis.⁴⁰ Persian was a crucial transregional idiom of prestige during the early modern period.⁴¹ The spread of Persian described different 'significant geographies' and underpinned forms of cultural conduct from Southeast Asia to the Persian Gulf.⁴² Connections and exchanges between the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal worlds were maintained largely through Persian.⁴³ For example, Muzaffar Alam's examination of Persian *akhlāq* texts on ethics and statecraft in the subcontinent shows the complex and long-lasting spread of political and cultural norms from the Persian Gulf region to Central Asia and northern India.⁴⁴ Persian became the political language at Muslim courts throughout the medieval and early modern periods. Work on intra-Asian elite migration has demonstrated how Iranian groups combined the skills of trade and state-building to move between Iran and several courts in the Deccan during the seventeenth century.⁴⁵ Most significantly, Persian was quasi-omnipresent when it came to history writing, at least in 'Islamicate' contexts of this period.⁴⁶ Courtly elites sponsored Persian transregional history writing from Iran to Central Asia and north India.⁴⁷ Rāzī was culturally rooted in this Persian cosmopolis and probably visited India, where his cousin served in different posts under the Mughal emperor Akbar and his successor, Jahangir.⁴⁸ He worked in a social environment that was characterized by professional mobility, and he provided a commentary to such geographical proximities and notions as mobile social groups experienced them during the sixteenth century. Thus, his delineation of the second clime makes sense as an imagined Arabic connection between the Red Sea region and western India, grounded in a reflection of prevailing social mobilities and cultural exchanges across the western Indian Ocean.

Rāzī's second clime, or western Indian Ocean connection, also paralleled an 'Arabic cosmopolis' of literary networks further south, which likewise stretched across core regions of the Indian Ocean world during the early modern period.⁴⁹ Ronit Ricci studied the transmission of *The book of one thousand questions* – essentially a conversion story structured in a list of questions that the Prophet Muhammad was asked by a Jewish leader – from Arabia, via south India, to Southeast Asia. She analysed the transregional dissemination of this Arabic text through processes of 'translation' and 'conversion', with 'tellings' produced in Tamil, Malay, and Javanese. Thereby, she built on Sheldon Pollock's concept of the 'Sanskrit cosmopolis', a term initially used by him to interrogate the dominant transregional discourse in Sanskrit that shaped political and

⁴⁰Gommans, 'Continuity and change'.

⁴¹The field of early modern Persianate studies is vast. See, for example, Muzaffar Alam, *The languages of political Islam, India, 1200–1800*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Courtly encounters: translating courtliness and violence in early modern Eurasia*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012.

⁴²See Orsini, 'Significant geographies'. For a recent assessment of studies on the Persianate world, see Mana Kia and Afshin Marashi, 'Introduction: after the Persianate', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, 36, 3, 2016, pp. 379–83.

⁴³Ali Anooshahr, 'Shirazi scholars and the political culture of the sixteenth-century Indo-Persian World', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 51, 3, 2014, pp. 331–52; Subrahmanyam, *Courtly encounters*; Francis Robinson, 'Ottomans–Safavids–Mughals: shared knowledge and connective systems', *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 8, 2, 1997, pp. 151–84.

⁴⁴For this and the following, see Alam, *Languages of political Islam*.

⁴⁵Subrahmanyam, 'Iranians abroad', pp. 340–63.

⁴⁶The term 'Islamicate' was originally coined by Marshall Hodgson and principally denotes a 'culture centred on a lettered tradition ... shared by both Muslims and non-Muslims', which distinguishes it from 'Islamic' as pertaining to the sphere of religious belief: Marshall Hodgson, *The venture of Islam, volume 1: the classical age of Islam*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1974, pp. 56–60.

⁴⁷This is implicit in Stephen Dale, *The Muslim empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

⁴⁸M. U. Memon, 'Amin Aḥmad Rāzī', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, I/9, p. 939, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/razi-amin-ahmad> (consulted 24 April 2020).

⁴⁹For this and the following, see Ronit Ricci, *Islam translated: literature, conversion, and the Arabic cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

cultural formations in South Asia during the first millennium.⁵⁰ Ricci employs the overarching notion of an Arabic cosmopolis to trace the emergence of a 'shared canon of texts' along 'literary networks'. This Arabic cosmopolis was 'defined by language, literature, and religion', and thereby represented a 'translocal Islamic sphere' that ultimately encompassed communities from the Arabian peninsula, across south India, and into mainland and maritime Southeast Asia.⁵¹ By looking at the 'intricate relationship between Islamization and literary and linguistic transformation', Ricci highlights the significance of literary networks to cultural processes and their change over time.

The variety of cosmopoles raises the issue of the relative use of Arabic and Persian across the Indian Ocean world and beyond more generally. Different strands of scholarship have offered different answers to this. Marshall Hodgson posited Arabic and Persian as two increasingly marked 'geographical zones' from the thirteenth century onwards, roughly congruent with the Arab Middle East and North Africa on the one hand, and Anatolia, Iran, Central Asia, and South and Southeast Asia on the other.⁵² Shahab Ahmed's magisterial *tour de force* through the 'Balkans-to-Bengal complex', which was dominated by a widely circulated 'Persian canon of literature' and thus constituted 'a common paradigm of Islamic life and thought', sparks the question of where Arabic fits into the Indian Ocean world, what cultural role it played, and for whom.⁵³ Previously, it was often assumed that the uses of Arabic in South Asia were restricted to religious rituals, and that the language merely served as a tool for the purpose of studying Islam.⁵⁴ This was reinforced by juxtaposing Arabic's religious significance with the secular and cultural importance of Persian.

Going beyond this dichotomy, Ricci's cosmopolis included vernacularized languages that became Arabicized over time.⁵⁵ This also implied that Arabic was in use across regions from East Africa, to south India, and into Southeast Asia.⁵⁶ Similarly, Michael Pearson considered Arabic as a crucial lingua franca of communication in maritime contexts from the Swahili coast, to south India, and into Southeast Asia.⁵⁷ He also pointed out that, in the fourteenth century, the famous traveller Ibn Battuta recognized the prevalence of different Arabic idioms across these oceanic worlds, alongside the practice of a higher Arabic idiom by some social groups. Muhsin al-Musawi recently introduced the notion of a 'Medieval Islamic Republic of Letters' to capture the significance of Arabic as a scholarly idiom and communicative medium across learned networks from Egypt to Central Asia.⁵⁸ For the region of Malabar, Sebastian Prange provided a detailed and vivid picture of Arabic contacts with the Red Sea region, which built on the *longue durée* of trade, political patronage, and religious networks.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, Persian served as an important language of exchange across the Bay of Bengal and became vernacularized across

⁵⁰Sheldon Pollock, *The language of the gods in the world of men: Sanskrit, culture, and power in premodern India*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006, pp. 12–19.

⁵¹For this and the following, see Ricci, *Islam translated*, p. 4.

⁵²Marshall Hodgson, *The venture of Islam, volume 2: the expansion of Islam in the middle periods*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1974, p. 293.

⁵³Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? The importance of being Islamic*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016, pp. 32, 38, 53.

⁵⁴Tahera Qutbuddin, 'Arabic in India: a survey and classification of its uses, compared with Persian', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 127, 3, 2007, pp. 315–38. This contrasts with the materials discussed in Zubaid Ahmad, *The contribution of Indo-Pakistan to Arabic literature, from ancient times to 1857*, Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1968.

⁵⁵Ricci, *Islam translated*.

⁵⁶Gommans, 'Continuity and change'.

⁵⁷Michael Pearson, 'Communication in the early modern Indian Ocean world', *Transforming Cultures*, 4, 2, 2009, pp. 23–7. See also Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'A handful of Swahili coast letters, 1500–1520', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 52, 2, 2019, pp. 255–81.

⁵⁸Muhsin al-Musawi, *The Medieval Islamic republic of letters: Arabic knowledge construction*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015.

⁵⁹Prange, *Monsoon Islam*.

different languages.⁶⁰ And Gagan Sood has shown how vernacularized forms of Persian provided the medium for epistolary communication between eighteenth-century South Asia and the Persian Gulf region.⁶¹

As will be shown below, Arabic historical writing emerged where Arabic scholarship had made a substantial landfall. By the fifteenth century, Arabic scholarship had begun to play an integral part in Islamicate court cultures and their learned communities in Gujarat, the Deccan, and Malabar, although the extent of this role has not been researched sufficiently yet.⁶² What comes up repeatedly, however, is that, when it comes to Islamicate scholarship, Arabic and Persian often went hand in hand. Prominent sources, such as the sixteenth-century historian Firishta of the Deccan, referred to the establishment of *madāris* (singular *madrasa*), ‘institutions of higher learning’, across the medieval Deccan to promote both Persian and Arabic for the teaching of a diverse set of Islamicate subjects.⁶³ Recent scholarship by Samira Sheikh named various Arabic scholars who contributed to the flourishing learned culture at the court of the Gujarati sultans, whose chronicles were written almost without exception in Persian.⁶⁴ As the recent meticulous research by Jyoti Gulati Balachandran has shown, learned groups beyond the courts in fifteenth-century Gujarat employed both Arabic and Persian in their textual traditions.⁶⁵ These were essentially community-building exercises intended to anchor growing Muslim communities in a spiritual geography and an erudite Islamicate tradition. Similarly, in China, Islamicate scholarship, both in Arabic and in Persian, provided the foundation for the elaboration of a Chinese Islamic canon – *Han kitab* – among scholarly networks of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁶⁶

This previous scholarship also implied that questions of sacredness, cultural heritage, language policies, and personal inclinations played an important role in the preference and use of Arabic and Persian. What this article explores is how such preferences changed as cultures changed over time. The subsequent study of the transoceanic reading and writing of Arabic historical texts builds on this diverse scholarship to emphasize historical contingencies over normative preconceptions. Tracing practices and texts in their changing contexts can paint an intricate picture of when and how the uses of Arabic became amplified, the connections that people could forge through it, and the meaning-making processes that it could thereby shape.

Reading Arabic histories in early modern South Asia

The exploration of a transoceanic Arabic historiography can start with those who read historical texts in the early modern period. The reception side also offers a more complex picture of the cultural importance of Arabic across the ocean. One way to approach reading habits of Arabophone audiences is to study which Arabic historical texts circulated in South Asia during this period. Scholarship on European book cultures provides meticulous studies on the history of

⁶⁰Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Explorations in connected history: from the Tagus to the Ganges*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 76–9.

⁶¹Gagan Sood, *India and the Islamic heartlands: an eighteenth-century world of circulation and exchange*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

⁶²For a recent study of Arabic influences in Malabar in the context of Islamic law, see Mahmood Kooriadhodi, ‘Cosmopolis of law: Islamic legal ideas and texts across the Indian Ocean and eastern Mediterranean worlds’, PhD thesis, Institute for History, Humanities, Leiden, 2016.

⁶³N. Ansari, ‘Bahmanid dynasty’, in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, 1988, vol. 3, fasc. 5, pp. 494–9.

⁶⁴Samira Sheikh, *Forging a region: sultans, traders, and pilgrims in Gujarat, 1200–1500*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 205–6.

⁶⁵Jyoti Balachandran, ‘Texts, tombs and memory: the migration, settlement and formation of a learned Muslim community in fifteenth-century Gujarat’, PhD thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 2012.

⁶⁶Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, *The dao of Muhammad: a cultural history of Muslims in late imperial China*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 37.

reading, and how specific individuals perused their books.⁶⁷ Manuscript versions of Arabic historical texts can be approached in a similar vein. To begin with, it is necessary to survey Arabic manuscript collections in the subcontinent. To my knowledge, the corpus of Arabic historical texts in manuscript collections in Hyderabad, Kolkata, Patna, and Rampur has not yet been studied. Manuscript notes, such as statements of scribes (most importantly the colophon at the end of a work stating its completion), reading notes, and ownership marks, are an invaluable record to assess the nuts and bolts of reading tastes and practices.⁶⁸ However, in the cases of Arabic histories, this record is more often fragmentary than not. Ultimately, manuscript notes can only indicate a general interest of South Asian communities in Arabic histories and thereby serve as a starting point to explore individual cases of reception through reading notes and references.

The biographical dictionary *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa- anba' abnā' al-zamān* (*The deceased of the nobles and news about the sons of time*) written by the famous thirteenth-century biographer and historian from Egypt and Syria Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282) dominates the collections of Arabic historical works across India. Several manuscripts of his text survive in libraries in Hyderabad, Patna, and Rampur.⁶⁹ Since the evolution of the collections in all three cities is complex and as yet almost unstudied, an essential aspect of the manuscripts' circulation histories is missing. It is therefore difficult to pin down where, how, and among whom these manuscripts circulated after they had been copied. What the actual manuscript versions show, though, is that scribes continuously copied and recopied Ibn Khallikān's famous biographical compendium over the early modern period. Copyists produced both Rampur versions during the sixteenth century.⁷⁰ Another version survives in the Khuda Bakhsh Library in Patna, bearing the seal of the Mughal Emperor Shāh Jahān.⁷¹

The South Asian circulation of Ibn Khallikān's biographical work is correlated with the usage of this text as a model for Arabic history writing in South Asia. As will be discussed in the following section in more detail, Ibn Khallikān appears in different ways in the sixteenth-century transoceanic histories from Gujarat and the Deccan. In Ḥājī al-Dabīr's text, he shows up in a historical digression, as a famous biographer from the Red Sea region. Ibn Shadqam partly continued and partly reworked Ibn Khallikān's biographical work. He exhibited how influential Ibn Khallikān's conception of writing a collective biography was until the sixteenth century. I suggest that Ibn Khallikān's centrality in the transoceanic history writing projects of the sixteenth century reflects his work's status as crucial historical reading material.

Ibn Khallikān's *Wafayāt al-a'yān* functioned as a 'prior text' for the pursuit of Arabic history writing.⁷² Ricci employed this concept and phenomenon in her analysis of translation practices across Southeast Asia.⁷³ The phenomenon describes the process by which 'familiar stories and characters [are used] to introduce new ideas and narratives'.⁷⁴ In other words, prior texts become manifest in the textual relationships between an earlier 'text' and its reworking in a different socio-cultural environment. Thereby, they help to establish localized histories for groups, which

⁶⁷Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, "'Studied for action": how Gabriel Harvey read his Livy', *Past & Present*, 129, 1, 1990, pp. 30–78.

⁶⁸Andreas Goerke and Konrad Hirschler, 'Introduction: manuscript notes as documentary sources', in Andreas Goerke and Konrad Hirschler, eds., *Manuscript notes as documentary sources*, Würzburg: Ergon-Verlag, 2011, pp. 9–20.

⁶⁹See, for example, Andhra Pradesh Oriental Manuscripts Library, Hyderabad, MS Ta'rikh 994; Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, Patna (henceforth KBOP), MS Arabic 650; and RRL, MS 4424–5 and MS 4426–7. See also the respective catalogue entries.

⁷⁰RRL, Rampur MS 4424–5 and MS 4426–7.

⁷¹KBOP, MS Arabic 650, fol. 270v. See also the KBOP catalogue.

⁷²Andreas Becker, *Beyond translation: essays toward a modern philology*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2000.

⁷³Ronit Ricci, 'Islamic literary networks in South and Southeast Asia', *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 21, 1, 2010, pp. 1–28; Ricci, *Islam translated*.

⁷⁴Ricci, *Islam translated*, pp. 246–7.

are simultaneously shared by translocal communities.⁷⁵ It was because Ibn Khallikān's presentation of a favourable Muslim community made for good reading across communities of the western Indian Ocean that it was conducive to transoceanic history-writing exercises.

Other Arabic historical texts also rose to fame across the subcontinent; taken together, they read like a historical library of the Red Sea region. Most of them are concerned with the regions of the Red Sea, from Egypt to the Hijaz and Yemen.⁷⁶ Compared to other genres, not many manuscripts survive from this period. Those that do survive are almost all copies from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries. For example, the history of Egypt was disseminated through the work *al-Ḥusn al-muḥādara fī ta'riḫ al-miṣr wa-l-qāhira* (*The excellence in lectures regarding the history of Egypt and Cairo*).⁷⁷ The famous fifteenth-century historian Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī compiled this text mainly based on biographies of people whom he considered important to the history of Egypt. At the same time, transoceanic Arabic histories reached a readership in the subcontinent. The previously mentioned fifteenth-century biographical dictionary by al-Sakhāwī, the *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi' li-ahl al-qarn al-tāsi'* (*The brilliant light regarding the people of the ninth century*), survives in manuscript versions, as well as in abridgments and summaries, in collections from Gujarat to Patna.⁷⁸ The sixteenth-century transoceanic history by al-'Aydārūs, *al-Nūr al-sāfir*, was copied across the early modern subcontinent.⁷⁹

To dig deeper, a case study from the Khuda Bakhsh Library in Patna can exemplify the extent to which South Asian readers engaged with Arabic histories of the Red Sea region. The text is one of the famous fifteenth-century histories of Medina, entitled *Wafā' al-wafā' bi-akhbār dār al-muṣṭafā* (*The fulfilment of compensation in the reports about the house of the Prophet (the chosen one)*), by 'Alī b. 'Abd Allāh al-Samhūdī (d. 911/1506), and it consists of an abridgement of his larger work on Medina.⁸⁰ The version at hand preserves al-Samhūdī's statement of completion at the end of the text, the initial compositional colophon. The scribe added a Persian completion note below, stating that he copied this text in the city of Ahmedabad in Gujarat in 1015/1606.⁸¹ More importantly, the same scribe (according to a similar hand) seems to have perused this Arabic manuscript thoroughly, and to have added an abundance of informed comments and extracts from other works in the margins. First, there are several correction notes and lexicographical annotations, which demonstrate traces of the reader's philological encounter with the text.⁸² Secondly, he placed *qif*-notes (the imperative of *waqafa*, meaning 'stop', addressed to the person reading the text) in the margins of the manuscript folios.⁸³ They function as highlighters of sections, labelling them for future reference. In particular, his *qif*-notes mark references to the Prophet's mosque in Medina, and further historical information on this highly venerated place.⁸⁴ Thirdly, the scribe was interested in other religious aspects of Medina as a holy Islamic city. For example, he marked with a *qif*-note a section that dealt with the superior quality of performing the fast (*ṣiyām*) in Medina.⁸⁵ These

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 248–9.

⁷⁶This is based on an examination of libraries in Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Patna, and Rampur.

⁷⁷RRL, MS 4395, MS 4396, and MS 4397; KBOPL, MS Arabic 1071. See also the KBOPL catalogue.

⁷⁸KBOPL, MSS Arabic 657 and 658, 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ḥalabī, *al-Qabas al-Ḥāwī li-ghurari ḍaw' al-Sakhāwī* (*The collectors firebrand regarding the finest from 'The light' of al-Sakhāwī*); see also KBOPL catalogue. Pīr Muḥammad Shāh Dargāh Library, Ahmedabad, MS 700, al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*; RRL, MS 4431, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Miṣrī, *al-Nūr al-sāfi' min al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'* (*The shining light from 'The brilliant light'*).

⁷⁹For example, KBOPL, MS Arabic 659.

⁸⁰KBOPL, MS Arabic 1091. For al-Samhūdī, see Harry Munt, 'Mamluk historiography outside of Egypt and Syria: 'Alī b. 'Abd Allāh al-Samhūdī and his histories of Medina', *Der Islam*, 92, 2, 2015, pp. 413–41.

⁸¹KBOPL, MS Arabic 1091, fol. 435v.

⁸²*Ibid.*, fols. 10–13.

⁸³For a discussion of such notes as 'notabilia', see Adam Gacek, *Arabic manuscripts: a vademecum for readers*, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2012, p. 168.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, fols. 139r, 212v, and 260v.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, fol. 24v.

examples of reading notes probably only represent a partial and incomplete record of the reader's engagement with the text, and more specifically one that was intended to help with future inquiries into the history of Medina. Nonetheless, this case study gives a sense of the profound interest that a reader had in the Islamic past and religious significance of the Hijaz. It thereby stands as an example of how deeply Arabic history writing concerned with the Red Sea region percolated across learned communities of Gujarat.

Arabic history writing in sixteenth-century South Asia

As shown above, mobile communities and literary networks have become crucial for studying social and cultural dynamics of transoceanic entanglements. What is more, the people involved left behind several Arabic historical texts, which reflect on their place in the western Indian Ocean region. Their texts help us understand how they perceived their transoceanic world, its past, and its people. In the following, I study the emergence of a transoceanic Arabic historiography as a corpus of texts and a scholarly practice. I argue that the sixteenth century witnessed a form of Arabic history writing that linked people, places, and practices of the Red Sea region and western India. The sixteenth-century western Indian Ocean connections created a social and cultural constellation in which Arabic, as a scholarly idiom of Islamicate prestige, became conducive to the pursuit of history writing among mobile groups. They traversed an Arabic cosmopolitan world reaching from the Hijaz and Yemen in the Red Sea region, to Gujarat, the Deccan, and Malabar across the sea. In their historical texts they reflected on the shared past of this transoceanic space, its communities, and its cultural traditions.

In sixteenth-century Gujarat, Ḥājī al-Dabīr's *Zafar al-wālih* offers a crucial case of Arabic history writing.⁸⁶ Yet, there are several problems with this text. So far, only one manuscript has been located, in the Calcutta madrasa, and this version, incomplete at the beginning and the end, serves as the commonly used edition. Since an introduction and other details about the work's history of composition are missing, not much is known about how the author presented his relationship with his text. In addition, the date of composition is not clear, but conjecture puts it in the early seventeenth century.⁸⁷ Based on the condition in which the manuscript was found, scholars have speculated that it remained a draft throughout the author's life, and did not circulate widely.⁸⁸

Ḥājī al-Dabīr's biography linked his personal fortunes and background closely to the Hijaz. He was of Meccan origin (b. 1540), and his father was responsible for the religious endowments (*awqāf*) of the Sultan of Gujarat in Mecca.⁸⁹ The family returned to Cambay in 1554, where Ḥājī al-Dabīr belonged to the scribal service elites in the sultanate of Gujarat, and worked for different nobles.⁹⁰ After the Mughal conquest of Gujarat in 1572/73, his father was tasked with the responsibility of administering Mughal religious endowments in Mecca and Medina. Ḥājī al-Dabīr accompanied him to deliver the necessary funds. After his father's death, he moved on to serve a different courtier in Khandesh, a region of the northern Deccan.

Thus, Ḥājī al-Dabīr was well established in Arabic elite networks in Gujarat and across the sea. Apart from his Hijazī background, he seemed to have retained strong personal ties with Mecca while living in Ahmedabad. In Gujarat, he belonged to the service elites of the sultanate. However, his family looked back on a long scholarly tradition. They could boast of scholarly successes in Patan, where they had held offices as muftis, judges, and teachers in the past.⁹¹ Patan, also *al-*

⁸⁶For this and the following, see Ulughkhānī, *Arabic history of Gujarat*, vol. 1, pp. v–ix.

⁸⁷For this and the following, see *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. viii, and vol. 2, pp. ix–x.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*

⁸⁹Ho, *Graves of Tarim*, p. 105.

⁹⁰For this and what follows, see Peter Jackson, 'Ḥādīdjī al-Dabīr', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, http://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_8583 (consulted 5 October 2017). See also Ho, *Graves of Tarim*, p. 122.

⁹¹Ulughkhānī, *Arabic history of Gujarat*, vol. 2, pp. xx–xxiv.

Nahrwāla in the Arabic and Persian sources (hence the element *al-Nahrwālī* in Ḥājji al-Dabīr's name), was a scholarly centre in Gujarat that was famous for a proliferation of learned figures. For example, the sixteenth-century historian, traveller, and Meccan ambassador to the Ottoman court, Quṭb al-Dīn al-Nahrwālī, hailed from an important service family in Patan, and wrote historical accounts of both Ottoman Yemen and Mecca in the Hijaz.⁹² Like Ḥājji al-Dabīr, Quṭb al-Dīn had a strong relationship with the Hijaz, where he refined his education in Islamic subjects during his extensive stays.

It is Ḥājji al-Dabīr's transregional connection that helps to explain why he chose Arabic to write his history. As pointed out before, in the South Asian context a Persian historiography flourished at the courts in Gujarat, the Mughal worlds, and the Deccan, but Arabic represented a medium through which Ḥājji al-Dabīr could relate to other audiences. His historical text mixes political chronologies, biographical entries of famous personages, and personal information.⁹³ It is split into two sections. The first covers the history of the sultans of Gujarat in the form of a succession of sultans, interspersed with further biographical entries and other 'digressions'. The second section contains the succession of the north Indian Muslim dynasties, ending with the Mughals. Here the similarities with frameworks of universal histories in the Indo-Persian historiography are striking. These histories differed from case to case but they generally accounted for the proliferation of selected Muslim dynasties up to the authors' own times.⁹⁴ Although it is impossible to provide an exhaustive analysis here, the Indo-Persian historiographical tradition seems to have served Ḥājji al-Dabīr as a blueprint for his own history.

Historical digressions, which pervade the larger narrative melange of dynastic succession and biographies of Ḥājji al-Dabīr's text, link his story back to the Red Sea. His historical radius extended beyond South Asia: for example, he integrated sections about the history of the town Zabīd in Yemen, which by the fifteenth century was a crucial transit point for scholars moving between the Hijaz and the subcontinent.⁹⁵ In the same vein, he included a biographical entry on Ibn Khallikān.⁹⁶ Ḥājji al-Dabīr gave a short summary of Ibn Khallikān's professional life and enumerated his scholarly skills, especially his qualities as a historian, which are manifest in *Wafayāt al-a'yān*.⁹⁷ As we have seen, in this biographical compilation, Ibn Khallikān brought together famous figures from across the Islamic world to expound their qualities, deeds, and virtues.⁹⁸ Ḥājji al-Dabīr dwells on the importance of this text, noting that a Persian translation of the work was produced, and offered to the Sultan of Gujarat as a gift.⁹⁹ In sum, Ḥājji al-Dabīr's audience is presented with hand-picked information about the history of the Red Sea region. Those elements were simultaneously highly relevant to the history of communities in his own social environment in Gujarat.

Another text underscores the profound transoceanic historical entanglements of the sixteenth century. The Arabic biographical work *al-Nūr al-sāfir* provides another case for the spread of Arabic history writing from the Red Sea to Gujarat in this period.¹⁰⁰ 'Abd al-Qādir al-'Aydārūs al-Ḥusaynī al-Ḥaḍramī al-Yamanī al-Hindī wrote the work while resident in

⁹²Richard Blackburn, 'Introduction', in Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Nahrwālī, *Journey to the Sublime Porte: the Arabic memoir of a Sharīfian agent's diplomatic mission to the Ottoman imperial court in the era of Suleyman the Magnificent; the relevant text from Quṭb al-Dīn al-Nahrwālī's al-Fawā'id al-saniyah fī al-riḥlah al-Madaniyah wa al-Rūmiyah*, Beirut and Würzburg: Orient-Institut and Ergon Verlag, 2005, pp. xi–xiv.

⁹³For this and the following, see Ulughkhānī, *Arabic history of Gujarat*, vol. 1, pp. viii–ix.

⁹⁴Conermann, *Historiographie*.

⁹⁵Ulughkhānī, *Arabic history of Gujarat*, vol. 1, pp. 88–97.

⁹⁶J. Fück, 'Ibn Khallikān', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, http://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_3248 (consulted 5 October 2017).

⁹⁷Ulughkhānī, *Arabic history of Gujarat*, vol. 1, p. 184.

⁹⁸Fück, 'Ibn Khallikān'.

⁹⁹Ulughkhānī, *Arabic history of Gujarat*, vol. 1, p. 32.

¹⁰⁰For this and the following, see Ho, *Graves of Tarim*, pp. 118–24; Oscar Löfgren, 'Aydārūs', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, http://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_0899 (consulted 8 December 2013); al-'Aydārūs, *al-Nūr al-sāfir*.

Ahmedabad in Gujarat during the early seventeenth century. He was a member of the al-‘Aydārūs kinship group, born in Ahmedabad in Gujarat in 978/1570, where he grew up to serve as a courtier, and thus offered his scholarly skills to the regional sultanate. He died in the same city in 1038/1628, after a full life of scholarship. The several *nisbas* (‘affiliations’) of his name point to the transregional dimension of his family lineage. They showcase how he negotiated the transoceanic dispersal of the al-‘Aydārūs family and his own past as part of his persona. The Ḥaḍramī origin of the family in Yemen coexisted with his own place of personal attachment in al-Hind.

Ho’s observations, which merge into a success story of Ḥaḍramī scholarship, can serve as a starting point to probe the wider historiographical significance of the work for the emergence of a transoceanic Arabic historiography.¹⁰¹ He points out how this work ‘chronicled’ communities, events, scholarly genealogies, and the expansion of Islamicate learning, and thereby created a transregional Islamicate space that encompassed the Indian Ocean from the Red Sea to Southeast Asia.¹⁰² Still, Ho concentrates on the particular significance of the work to the family project of the Ḥaḍramī Sayyids. Building on this, I want to elaborate on significant themes of al-‘Aydārūs’ biographical work. He incorporated into his work several clues about the more widespread rise of Arabic learned pursuits. Therefore, al-‘Aydārūs’ biographical work has to be seen in the wider context of Arabic history writing across sixteenth-century western India. At the same time, his work was embedded in a complex socio-cultural environment conducive to the composition of Arabic historical texts in seventeenth-century Gujarat. The fact that the work appeared in Gujarat signifies transoceanic connections that go beyond his family network. A larger transoceanic scholarly world spread out across the ocean and combined with a local community receptive towards Arabic scholarship.

Al-‘Aydārūs’ work has a strong intertextual relationship with al-Sakhāwī’s collective biography *al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmi’*. As Ho points out, he used the same centennial framework for his work and he furthermore stated in the foreword that his work contained ‘the great events and wonders of the tenth century hijrī’ (roughly the sixteenth century) together with the obituaries of its ‘great men’ (kings, scholars, judges, men of letters, and the righteous),¹⁰³ ‘be they Egyptian or Syrian, Hijāzī or Yamānī, Rūmī or Indian, Mashriqī or Maghribī’.¹⁰⁴ Thus, his idea of the Islamicate world, mapped out in the introduction, echoed al-Sakhāwī’s, and it shaped their biographical works accordingly. Whereas al-Sakhāwī had gained scholarly prestige in the Hijaz, al-‘Aydārūs experienced the increasing transregional movements of various social groups in Gujarat. He structured his whole work as a chronicle: while al-Sakhāwī compiled an enormous list of biographical entries, al-‘Aydārūs arranged events and biographies according to the sequence of years from 901 to 1000 *hijrī*.¹⁰⁵ Like al-Sakhāwī’s, al-‘Aydārūs’ historiographical treatise praised the pursuit of intellectual endeavours in the rhetoric of the prosopographical.¹⁰⁶ These prosopographical elements (the biographical entries) need to be studied further to explore the ways in which al-‘Aydārūs placed learned pursuits of individuals at the centre of a transoceanic cultural connection.

A deeper scholarly and cultural relationship between Gujarat and the Hijaz is also clear from the wider choice of biographical entries in the *Nūr al-sāfir*. This goes beyond the aforementioned intellectual link that al-‘Aydārūs established with al-Sakhāwī, his former teacher.¹⁰⁷ During the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, the importance of the Hijaz rested not only in the *haramayn* (the two holy places of Mecca and Medina), but also in its role as a scholarly centre.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰¹Ho, *Graves of Tarim*, pp. 122–4.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, pp. 118–24.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, pp. 118–19.

¹⁰⁴Al-‘Aydārūs, *al-Nūr al-sāfir*, p. 17.

¹⁰⁵Ho, *Graves of Tarim*, pp. 118–20.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, p. 120.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, p. 123.

¹⁰⁸For example, see Meloy, *Imperial power*.

Al-‘Aydārūs offered biographies of personages who travelled from Gujarat to the Hijaz. Here, the emphasis rests on the transformation of their educational trajectory that took place while residing in the Hijaz. For example, the main entry for the year 955/1548 is the return to Gujarat of al-Khān al-A‘zam Aṣafkhān al-Kujarati [al-Gujarati], a vizier of the Sultan of Gujarat (*manṣab al-wizāra*), from Mecca, where he had been sent by the Gujarati rulers.¹⁰⁹ Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam recently studied a historical text by Jārullāh b. Fahd from sixteenth-century Mecca, which devotes many references to Aṣafkhān as the head of the Gujarati embassy in Mecca, his efforts in creating an amicable relationship with the rulers of Mecca, and his extensive patronage activities among the learned communities.¹¹⁰ Al-‘Aydārūs, however, puts greater emphasis on Aṣafkhān’s own learned pursuits.¹¹¹ Early on, he became well versed in several fields of knowledge. Even more crucial were his scholarly transactions, and the social networks that he forged as part of his administrative post in the Hijaz. In Mecca, he was an important benefactor for the resident scholars. The students flocked to him, and through his charitable activities in the field of knowledge (*‘ilm*) they excelled in their studies. Aṣafkhān thus personified the importance of the Hijaz as a magnet for scholars, and in Gujarat al-‘Aydārūs seemed to have been so well placed in the flow of transoceanic information that he could observe this *en détail*.

Al-‘Aydārūs was himself an itinerant scholar, who travelled widely to study and collect books. His own entry in the book puts him on the map as a central learned figure.¹¹² It showcases his educational upbringing, his compositional activities, and the links he forged with other scholars of repute. In Gujarat he shared the mobile transregional world of scholars, Sufis, and sultans, who came to him for advice, blessings, and learning. Al-‘Aydārūs was also an important Sufi shaykh (mystical and spiritual leader in Islam), and he was eligible to bestow the *khirqā* (lit. ‘garment’) of affiliation on new disciples of his Sufi path (*ṭarīqa*).¹¹³ Learned men from across the western Indian Ocean approached him on scholarly and spiritual matters. The names of the listed affiliates sketch the transregional contours of the western Indian Ocean. They represent the various regions from al-‘Allāma al-Shahīr Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Sinbāṭī al-Makkī al-Miṣrī in Egypt, to al-Sayyid al-Jalīl . . . al-Shāmī al-Makkī in Mecca, al-Shaykh al-Ṣāliḥ al-‘Allāma . . . al-Ḥaḍramī in Yemen, and al-Shaykh al-Kabīr al-‘Allāma al-Shahīr Badr al-Dīn Ḥasan . . . al-Kawkinī al-Hindī in the South Asian subcontinent. Here again, names are important for the places and connections they signify in the grand scheme of things. The people behind the names make up the social fabric of a historically and culturally linked western Indian Ocean connection.

In the sixteenth-century Deccan, sultans offered courtly patronage to mobile scholars for their transoceanic Arabic history projects. Ibn Shadqam al-Madani’s biographical and historical work *Zahr al-riyāḍ* presents one such effort with regard to the court of Ahmadnagar, one of the five Deccani courts which succeeded the Bahmanīs over the course of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.¹¹⁴ His peregrinations bear witness to the persistent connections between the Hijaz and the Deccan, as well as the high mobility of elite groups in this period.¹¹⁵

The biographer and historian Sayyid Abū l-Makārim al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī b. Shadqam al-Madani was born in Medina in 1535, and died in the Deccan in 1590.¹¹⁶ Following in the footsteps of his

¹⁰⁹For this and the following, see al-‘Aydārūs, *al-Nūr al-sāfir*, pp. 325–30.

¹¹⁰Alam and Subrahmanyam, ‘View from Mecca’, pp. 297–303.

¹¹¹For this and the following, see al-‘Aydārūs, *al-Nūr al-sāfir*, pp. 325–30.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, pp. 447–53.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, p. 447.

¹¹⁴This work has not yet been edited. I collected one set of surviving manuscripts in three volumes from libraries in Kolkata, Rampur, and London: see details in n. 22. For the Deccani sultanates, see Richard Eaton, *A social history of the Deccan, 1300–1761: eight Indian lives*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, ch. 5. For a rather dated account of the Sultanate of Ahmadnagar, see Radhey Shyam, *The kingdom of Ahmadnagar*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1966.

¹¹⁵Roy Fischel, ‘Society, space, and the state in the Deccan sultanates, 1565–1636’, PhD thesis, University of Chicago, 2012.

¹¹⁶For this and the following, see Al-Sayyid Muḥsin al-Amīn, *‘Ayān al-shī‘a (The nobles of the Shī‘a)*, 4th edn, 11 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Ta‘āruf, 1986), vol. 5, pp. 175–9.

father, he became *naqīb al-ashrāf* (chief of the *ashrāf*, that is, a line of descendants of the Prophet Muhammad), and a *mutawallī* ('custodian') of the Prophet's grave.¹¹⁷ However, Ibn Shadqam resigned from his post and left Medina. He travelled widely to visit the shrines of the Shi'i imams at Najaf, Kerbala, and Mashhad, and made contact with the Safavid court in Iran, and the Nizāmshāhī court in the Deccan. While affiliated to the court of the Nizāmshāhī dynasty in Ahmadnagar, he composed the *Zahr al-riyād*. After his death, his body was brought to the cemetery of Medina *al-Baqi*, where he was buried.¹¹⁸ Scholarship on him and his work is limited to general references by Werner Ende and Zubaid Ahmad.¹¹⁹ Jacqueline Sublet and Muriel Rouabah placed his biographical work in a larger group of texts, whose authors used the previously mentioned prominent biographical dictionary by Ibn Khallikān when composing recensions and continuations for their own period.¹²⁰

Ibn Shadqam's biographical work again demonstrates a deep historical connection with the Red Sea region. According to the introduction to the *Zahr al-riyād*, he composed it during the years 1580–84, while he was affiliated to the court of Murtadā Nizāmshāh.¹²¹ Furthermore, he recounts his reading (*mutāla'a*) of Ibn Khallikān's prosopography as a meaningful impetus to writing his own work.¹²² He thereby places himself in an intellectual relationship with Ibn Khallikān's *Wafayāt al-a'yān*. There is also a close textual link, as many personages who feature in Ibn Shadqam's prosopographical account are derived from Ibn Khallikān's biographical community.¹²³ Transregionally famous and notorious figures appear across Ibn Shadqam's work, such as Jingīz Khān, as well as Saljuq kings, 'Abbāsīd viziers, and poets and scholars from east to west.¹²⁴ Sultan Amīr Timur (Tamerlane) turns up as well, because of the political repercussions he caused across West and South Asia. His entry is followed by biographical entries for his successors, enshrined in a Timurid genealogy that ends in Humayun, son of Babur, the founder of the Mughal empire.¹²⁵ Deccani rulers are mentioned as well.¹²⁶ Ibn Shadqam continues his predecessor's idea of bringing together these figures of great importance in an imagined transregional Muslim community.

Ibn Shadqam's transoceanic Arabic history project has to be seen in the context of a Persianate cosmopolitan world that the Deccan shared in the sixteenth century. Roy Fischel recently elaborated on the Persian history-writing activities at the early modern Deccani courts.¹²⁷ The writers of major Persian chronicles, such as Firishta, Shirazi, and Tabataba'i, wrote their histories in the Deccan from the 1590s to the 1620s. They belonged to the faction of the 'foreigners' (*gharibān*) at these courts, mainly hailing from Iran, and building on Persian as both a cosmopolitan language and an established cultural idiom that was supposed to guide personal 'comportment' and the arts of 'statecraft'.¹²⁸ Factional rivalries often occurred between these Persianate foreigners and the groups of the 'Deccanis', the majority of whom were locally rooted

¹¹⁷Werner Ende, 'The Nakhawila, a Shiite community in Medina', *Die Welt des Islams*, 37, 3, 1997, p. 271.

¹¹⁸Al-Amīn, *'Ayān al-shī'a*, vol. 5, pp. 175–9.

¹¹⁹Ende, 'Nakhawila'; Ahmad, *Contribution of Indo-Pakistan*, pp. 184–5.

¹²⁰Jacqueline Sublet and Muriel Rouabah, 'Une famille de textes autour d'Ibn Ḥallikān entre VIIe/XIIIe et XIe/XVIIe siècle : documents historiques et biographiques arabes conservés à l'IRHT', *Bulletin d'études orientales*, 58, 2009, pp. 69–86.

¹²¹Ibn Shadqam, vol. 1 (see n. 22), fol. 7v; National Library, Kolkata, *Catalogue of the Arabic manuscripts in the Būhār Library*, Calcutta, 1923.

¹²²Ibn Shadqam, vol. 1, fol. 7v.

¹²³Ahmad, *Contribution of Indo-Pakistan*, pp. 184–5.

¹²⁴See the *fihrist* (catalogue) at the beginning of Ibn Shadqam, vol. 1.

¹²⁵*Ibid.*, fol. 96r, and the following folios.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*, fol. 71v.

¹²⁷Fischel, 'Origin narratives', pp. 71–3.

¹²⁸Eaton, *Social history of the Deccan*, p. 76. See Fischel, 'Society', p. 180, n. 4, for the preference for the term 'foreigner' rather than 'Westerner' as translated by Eaton.

Muslims, who communicated in the Dakhnī language.¹²⁹ While these foreign scholarly and administrative elites were crucial to the state-building exercises of the Deccani courts, they always had one foot out of the door, keeping close ties to their homelands.¹³⁰ However, while affiliated at different times to the courts of Ahmadnagar and its neighbouring sultanate, Bijapur, these historians provided crucial ‘origin narratives’ for the local dynasties.¹³¹ They used common tropes, and moulded familiar stories to make ‘improbable narratives’ sound reliable. They provided the Deccani courts with a diverse corpus of Persian history writing, as well as a Persian past and genealogy that linked the Deccani dynasties with famous dynastic lineages from western Asia. Thus, they integrated the Deccan into a sixteenth-century cosmopolitan world of Persian mobilities.

Ibn Shadqam’s case is similar in a way. His activities map an Arabic cosmopolitanism that coexisted side by side with the Persianate sphere. He shared a wider Arabic transregional idiom with the mobile elites of the western Indian Ocean region. While he moved between the interconnected worlds from the Red Sea region to al-Hind, Iran, and back again, Arabic opened doors at the Deccani court of Ahmadnagar, allowing him to translate his scholarly skills into successful courtly patronage. He brought with him a text and model of Arabic history writing from the Red Sea region that he reshaped socially and culturally. To a local and translocal audience he could present a transoceanic social history that linked the Red Sea region, Iran, and the Deccan in a cultural space in which Arabic functioned as a transregional idiom side by side with Persian.

Moving further to the south Indian region of Malabar, Zayn al-Dīn al-Malibārī’s *Tuhfat al-Mujāhidīn* is important for the sixteenth century.¹³² Al-Malibārī, on whom biographical information is scarce, composed it during the second half of that century.¹³³ It consists of four sections: the first is a compilation of prophetic traditions with stipulations about *jihād*, the second provides an account of the spread of Islam in Malabar, and the third concerns the customs of the non-Muslim inhabitants of Malabar. These three parts function as an introduction to the fourth part: the ‘account of the proceedings of the Portuguese’ from the time of their arrival in 1498 to 1579.¹³⁴ Scholarship over recent decades has repeatedly made use of this narrative source to study the military conflict of Malabarī polities with the Portuguese during the sixteenth century, and the competition over the Indian Ocean spice trade, as well as forms of conversion, and the spread of Islam across south India.¹³⁵ Most recently, Prange has edited an English translation of a text from south India which bears a strong textual relationship with al-Malibārī’s narrative, indicating a wide transcultural circulation of his text in south India.¹³⁶ But, while Malabar was closely linked with the wider Red Sea region through trade and scholarly networks, it is nonetheless difficult to locate al-Malibārī within these activities.¹³⁷

¹²⁹Eaton, *Social history of the Deccan*, pp. 67–70, 76; Fischel, ‘Society’, p. 7; Gijs Kruitzer, *Xenophobia in seventeenth-century India*, Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2009, pp. 74 ff.

¹³⁰Subrahmanyam, ‘Iranians abroad’; Fischel ‘Society’.

¹³¹Here and in the following, see Fischel, ‘Origin narratives’.

¹³²Al-Malibārī, British Library, MS IO Islamic 2807e.

¹³³Al-Malibārī, *Tohfut-ul-mujahideen: an historical work in the Arabic language, translated into English by M. J. Rowlandson*, London: Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland, 1833, pp. vii–xvi.

¹³⁴Al-Malibārī, British Library, MS IO Islamic 2807e, fol. 113v.

¹³⁵Stephen Dale, *Islamic society on the South Asian frontier: the Māppilas of Malabar 1498–1922*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980; Sebastian Prange, ‘A trade of no dishonor: piracy, commerce, and community in the western Indian Ocean, twelfth to sixteenth century’, *American Historical Review*, 116, 5, 2011, pp. 1269–93; Engseng Ho, ‘Custom and conversion in Malabar: Zayn al-Dīn al-Malibārī’s gift of the Mujahidin: some accounts of the Portuguese’, in Barbara Metcalf, ed., *Islam in South Asia in practice*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009, pp. 403–8.

¹³⁶Sebastian Prange, ‘The pagan king replies: an Indian perspective on the Portuguese arrival in India’, *Itinerario*, 41, 1, 2017, pp. 151–73.

¹³⁷The introduction to a new edition of the work sadly does not back up claims of Zayn al-Dīn’s transregional exploits and contacts across the Red Sea region. See Muhammad Husayn Nainar, *Tuhfat al-mujahidin: a historical epic of the sixteenth century*, Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2006, pp. xix–xxi.

Instead, his choice of language can be explained based on the historical significance of Arabic within his wider socio-cultural setting. For the recompilation of prophetic traditions on *jihad* in the first part of the introduction, Arabic seemed to be the natural choice, predetermined by the genre of *hadith*. His decision to compose the historical sections in Arabic was then probably a logical continuation. The use of Arabic for the composition of his historical work reflects on the close relationship that Malabar already had, and continued to have, with regions and societies across the sea – to Yemen and the Hijaz in one direction, and to Southeast Asia in the other.¹³⁸ Malabar was an important contributor to the Indian Ocean spice trade, a crucial crossing point for travellers and traders coming from west or east, and therefore central to the networks of the wider Indian Ocean.¹³⁹

The political history of the early modern Indian Ocean provides a necessary context to explain the emergence of this historical text.¹⁴⁰ The Portuguese had entered the region as competitors in the lucrative trade in spices from Malabar to Egypt. However, their combined military and commercial ventures were complemented by Ottoman expansionism into the Indian Ocean. Giancarlo Casale recently argued that Portuguese and Ottoman ‘discoveries’ of the Indian Ocean built on similar interests in access to the spice trade.¹⁴¹ This was accompanied by the expression of similar notions of universal empire.¹⁴² The Ottoman conquest of Egypt and the Hijaz was therefore part of a larger strategy to take control of these commercial activities, and to formulate claims of a global caliphate, just as the maritime blockade of Mecca’s seaport Jidda in 1517 was a move by the Portuguese intended to encroach on these economic activities.¹⁴³ This military conflict had already involved the Mamlūk empire, forged short-term alliances between their Ottoman successors and the sultanate of Gujarat, and even reverberated as far as the neighbouring realm of Bijapur.¹⁴⁴ The sultans of the Ottoman empire, Gujarat, and Bijapur, and the Portuguese forces, as well as a host of local power-holders in the Hijaz and Malabar, became entangled in a political power struggle over the commercial prospects of Indian Ocean trade.¹⁴⁵

In the context of these emerging political fault lines, al-Malibārī’s narrative made use of Arabic to reflect on the politics of Malabar’s past and present. He stated his political purpose in writing this work in the introduction.¹⁴⁶ He aimed to unite a hitherto allegedly inactive group of Muslim states from around the western Indian Ocean to defeat the Portuguese invaders of Malabar. The choice of Arabic made sense in the complex political setting of the sixteenth-century western Indian Ocean. Al-Malibārī’s case shows that, by the sixteenth century, Arabic history writing formed part of a transoceanic dissemination that permeated deeply into courtly societies in South Asia. His choice of language was particularly important in terms of the audience he envisioned. The book had a specific addressee, being dedicated to ‘Alī ‘Ādil Shāh I (r. 965/1535–987/1558) of Bijapur, one of the Deccan sultanates.¹⁴⁷ He cited the sultan’s excellent track record as a just and legitimate Muslim ruler, together with his military zeal, in a panegyric fashion, thus making a case for armed resistance against the Portuguese.¹⁴⁸ More specifically, the stated purpose, introduction, and structure of al-Malibārī’s work show that the objective

¹³⁸Ho, *Graves of Tarim*.

¹³⁹Prange, ‘Measuring by the bushel’; Ho, *Graves of Tarim*, pp. 101–3.

¹⁴⁰Ho, *Graves of Tarim*, pp. 100–3.

¹⁴¹Casale, *Ottoman age of exploration*, esp. pp. 4–8, 23–6.

¹⁴²Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Explorations in connected history: Mughals and Franks*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005.

¹⁴³Alam and Subrahmanyam, ‘View from Mecca’, pp. 290–6.

¹⁴⁴Ho, *Graves of Tarim*, p. 101.

¹⁴⁵Casale, *Ottoman age of exploration*; Ho, *Graves of Tarim*, p. 101.

¹⁴⁶Al-Malibārī, British Library, MS IO Islamic 2807e. For further analysis, see Prange, *Monsoon Islam*, pp. 146–8.

¹⁴⁷Deborah Hutton, ‘Ādil Shāhī’, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, http://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_23656 (consulted 24 May 2018).

¹⁴⁸Al-Malibārī, British Library, MS IO Islamic 2807e, fols. 112v–113v.

of dedicating this work was political communication with a Muslim court, and not just the addition of an Arabic book to the royal library.¹⁴⁹ Within this process, Arabic represented not only the preferred medium of telling, but also an accepted language for reading a historical narrative about the region of Malabar.

Conclusion

The sixteenth-century western Indian Ocean witnessed a confluence of factors that allowed a transoceanic Arabic historiography to emerge beyond its waters. The proliferation of Arabic history writing was traceable from Gujarat, to the Deccan, and to Malabar. Mobile and transregionally connected scholars used Arabic to reflect on the pasts of regions and communities, east and west. These transoceanic historians thrived on mobility, learned pursuits, and shared networks from the Red Sea region to Iran, Gujarat, and the Deccan. Their narratives built on scholarly authorities and their texts from across the Red Sea region. Yet, their works did not emerge out of nowhere. Surviving Arabic historical manuscripts and their notes indicate a readership with a diverse interest in the history of Egypt and the Hijaz, but also the wider western Indian Ocean region as a whole. Arabophone communities of the western Indian Ocean shared their connected pasts through writing and reading. By the late sixteenth century, a mobile scholar from the Persian cosmopolis observed this transoceanic space as a distinct cultural zone, and as a transoceanic Arabic connection that linked the Red Sea with the subcontinent.

The study of writing and reading practices in this transoceanic context offers an empirically grounded trajectory to explore forms of transregional cultural integration. Within the field of global historical scholarship, the dimension and degree of 'global integration' is a recurring topic.¹⁵⁰ It often involves the question of when a historical phenomenon is truly global. In the current context, the western Indian Ocean did not witness a 'systemic integration on a global scale'.¹⁵¹ At the same time, however, the story of 'global integration' is not a one-way street. The above-mentioned scholarship has drawn a complex picture of ups and downs, phases of acceleration and of slowdown, and a multitude of connections and interdependencies. Since it is not the geographical extent of a historical process that determines its 'globality', the level and intensity of transregional integration has to be examined based on other parameters. Writing, reading, and sharing the history of communities and their practices across regions can inform inquiries into the cultural integration of human spaces along connections and mobilities.

Delineating changing transregional constellations, based on social and cultural connections in the study of a transoceanic Arabic historiography, can inform and elaborate on recent approaches to global history. Sanjay Subrahmanyam developed the concept of 'connected histories' as a global framework for historical inquiry.¹⁵² By tracing change in 'symbolic and ideological constructs' in the context of South Asia, and the subcontinent's wider links with the regions of early modern Eurasia, he provides a heuristic basis for the investigation of interrelated social and cultural processes across time and space. Most importantly, it is the emphasis on individuals and communities, in the way that they transcend and encompass a variety of regionally fixed histories, which offers an angle to explore the historically contingent connections. Flows of ideas and cultural constructs can be related in their global spread to regional adaptation and reformulation. This can be brought into a fecund dialogue with Arif Dirlik's call 'to confront the contingencies and ground-level processes of human activity with the structures that are at once the product

¹⁴⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰Sebastian Conrad, *What is global history?*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016.

¹⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁵²Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Connected histories: notes towards a reconfiguration of early modern Eurasia', *Modern Asian Studies*, 31, 3, 1997, pp. 736–45.

and the conditions of that activity'.¹⁵³ The transoceanic Arabic historiography offers a manuscript- and text-based angle to study such forms of cultural dialogue as a 'process' and a 'performance'.¹⁵⁴ The people involved traversed the western Indian Ocean, and thereby imagined, wrote, and read about its shared history in Arabic. They created their cultural space, a 'significant geography', by writing and reading Arabic histories in it.¹⁵⁵ These cultural practices offer a conceptual pathway to 'spatialize the past', and thus acknowledge change over time in this cultural formation itself.¹⁵⁶ The practice of transoceanic Arabic history writing further stresses historical contingency and change over time in the globalizing early modern Indian Ocean world.

The early modern Indian Ocean world was very much a multi-centric one.¹⁵⁷ Instead of seeing the Arabic and the Persian cosmopolis as exclusive spheres of influence, this research has emphasized that Arabic and Persian circulations were enmeshed with each other, and constituted often complementary cultural flows in these transoceanic connections. Each language offered a range of opportunities for mobile scholars within and across the respective cosmopolis. Still, the study of Arabic historical texts through manuscript versions provides a bottom-up approach to complicate the broad-brush effects of seeing the Indian Ocean world through the eyes of such cosmopolitan cultural formations. As an intellectual practice, it represents one form of a transregional cultural integration within the Indian Ocean world.

Thus, for the early modern period it is necessary to ask wider questions about the social and cultural interactions of Arabophone communities on both sides of the ocean. Further research in South Asian archives and manuscript collections – which offer a range of early modern Arabic (and Persian) texts that were shared with communities in Anatolia, Egypt, the Hijaz, Yemen, and Iran – is necessary to study these entanglements from the viewpoint of other textual traditions, networks, and practices, and to determine moments of cultural interaction and confluence, but also shifts and suspension of these connections.

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¹⁵³Arif Dirlik, 'Performing the world: reality and representation in the making of world histor(ies)', *Journal of World History*, 16, 4, 2005, p. 396.

¹⁵⁴These terms are emphasized in *ibid*. See also the conceptual approach in Finbarr B. Flood, *Objects of translation: material culture and medieval 'Hindu-Muslim' encounter*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009.

¹⁵⁵Orsini, 'Significant geographies'.

¹⁵⁶Dirlik, 'Performing the world', p. 392.

¹⁵⁷Vink, 'Indian Ocean studies'.